



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Transport for the South East
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To whom it may concern,

I write in response to the Transport for the South East Draft Transport Strategy consultation.

Ensuring co-ordinated transport policy is vital to boost economic growth, minimise disruption and support our communities. Runnymede and Weybridge benefits from proximity to many of our major transport networks, the M25, M3 and A3, mainline rail services to London and of course Heathrow Airport. As a result, the area attracts many national and international businesses, creating high quality skilled jobs, and economic success unrivalled outside of London. However, proximity to these networks also brings challenges for business and the residents who live here.

Our experience highlights the need for a co-ordinated transport strategy, and the risks should this fail to be delivered. I have set out below a number of the key challenges we face that need to be addressed as part of this work, and an overview of the work I have been doing and suggested approach to address these.

Any transport strategy needs to be able to bring together co-ordinated policy which can resolve the challenges we face now and plan for the future. I am keen to work with all stakeholders to achieve this aim, and would welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss this further.

Current issues that need to be addressed include:

Management of major infrastructure projects

The DCO process for major infrastructure projects is notoriously cumbersome, taking years at huge cost, which can delay the delivery of essential infrastructure. This process should be reviewed, learning lessons from approach taken in other jurisdictions, to determine how this can be streamlined while retaining input from communities and key stakeholders.

The management of major infrastructure projects and maintenance works also needs to be addressed. The disruption caused by major projects which can take months or even years can be debilitating to local communities and businesses. The recent M25/A3 works is a clear case of this, with clear evidence of poor communication between project partners as well as the public and key stakeholders, under resourcing and poor planning resulting in avoidable delays. This has a huge economic cost given the impact on businesses, goods delayed, and countless lost work hours.

Having raised these concerns on numerous occasions with the regulator, the Office for Rail and Road, it is apparent there is little direct oversight of these projects nor effective enforcement regime in place. I would therefore support the introduction of stricter criteria for the management and delivery of such works, including clear monitoring processes and

enforcement penalties, to ensure more efficient and effective project management.

Managing local road infrastructure

Too many residents face unnecessary daily delays and disruption due to street works which is having an increasingly serious negative impact on our communities and businesses.

Last year I conducted a survey of local residents affected by this issue. 90% of respondents stated they had regularly faced delay and disruption from local road and street works. 69% had experience delays getting to work. 35% had been delayed getting their children to school. 22% have missed or been late for medical appointment due to the disruption. And 20% stated their business or income had been negatively affected.

In light of this I responded to the Government consultation on street works last year, calling for:

- Mandatory co-ordination and consideration of the cumulative effect of street works, road works, and diversion routes.
- Stronger financial penalties for poorly managed or poor quality street works.
- Expansion of enforcement powers to also consider disruption caused due to inaction or long-term underinvestment in utilities infrastructure.
- Allowing overrun charges to apply at weekends and bank holidays.
- Reform of highways funding to reflect road usage, so we have adequate funds to meet road maintenance and repair needs.
- Serious consideration of changes to ensure no licenses for non-essential street works could be granted in the vicinity of diversion routes.

A copy of my full consultation response is available here:

www.drben Spencer.org.uk/news/tackling-road-delays-and-disruption-street-works-consultation-response-submitted

I have also been working to address the issue of HGVs using inappropriate routes through towns and villages. As part of a co-ordinated transport policy, we must engage road users to encourage them to use networks appropriately. I have been engaging with logistics companies locally to encourage corporate level engagement and agreement of suitable routes for large vehicles, especially HGVs, to protect communities from the impact of these vehicles on inappropriate routes. I would like to see this engagement approach adopted at a national level.

Performance and reliability of rail networks

Hundreds of thousands of people travel through my constituency on our rail network each year. This is vital to both economic productivity and social connectivity, however too often these vital routes are beset by delays, missed connections, resourcing issues and poor communication.

The news that South Western Railway will be the first rail company to be nationalised under the Government's new Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Act, provides a potential opportunity to address these issues.

I have spent the past five years campaigning for improvements and raising issues on behalf of residents relating to delays, safety, accessibility, timetabling, repeated closure of our branch line, lack of co-ordination and communication between the operator and Network Rail, ticket offices, investment and more. While some of these have been addressed and improved, progress is too slow, and residents are not receiving the level of service or value for money they deserve.

By nationalising our rail operators, I hope the Government's intent is to take swift action to address these issues, and I look forward to working with them to improve our local services, but further clarity on how this will be achieved will be essential to any co-ordinated transport

policy.

One specific part of this work I wish to draw attention to is the issue of level crossings. Effectively managing level crossings is also vital to performance of both rail and road networks. While necessary in some areas, where issues arise they can cause misery for residents and harming the local economy.

Runnymede and Weybridge is particularly affected by this, with multiple crossings across the constituency, but most notably in the Egham area where four crossings in close proximity can cripple local road infrastructure. This was made worse by signalling changes made in 2023 which lengthened crossing down times, especially those over 10 minute duration.

There are limited options available in many locations, however I believe all efforts should be made to remove level crossings where possible, minimise barrier down times, and install pedestrian crossings where required.

I have been pressing Network Rail to review data to ensure barrier operations are optimised and disruption is minimised, however this required detailed technical modelling. It is vital our network operators have the technical resources necessary to ensure efficient operations, and I would urge this to be considered as a priority for future investment.

We must also look to utilise opportunities from development or infrastructure upgrades to deliver solutions which may not be feasible when considered as a standalone project. The proposed expansion of Heathrow Airport, and potential Heathrow southern rail link provide this opportunity for a detailed review of services, including level crossings, in the local area.

Accessibility and affordability

Another crucial element which must be addressed is accessibility of transport options. Our transport networks must be available to all, however too often those with accessibility issues are left unable to access the services they need.

On our rail network, passengers face the challenge of many of our stations not providing step free access, and even when lifts are in place they are frequently out of service. The case of Weybridge Station lifts is a prime example, and one well known at the Department for Transport, given the frequent failures, compounded by station staffing issues and poor communication of operational status, leaving passengers stranded and unable to get to work or home on many occasions.

I also raised the need for more accurate travel information, including lift service status and effective connection times, so all passengers have the confidence that when they travel, they can do so without frequent disruption and delay.

In the last parliament the Government brought in a range of interventions to improve accessibility at rail stations but more is still needed. I believe there should be a system wide accessibility review as part of nationalisation, and I would urge Transport for the South East and the Department for Transport to continue this work and engage with disability groups, including the National Rail Disability Group, and key stakeholders so all residents can benefit from improved and integrated transport networks.

Bus networks are also vital if we are encouraging more people to use public transport. In recent decades many routes have been abolished or drastically reduced, operating infrequently or on routes which do not meet local needs. I fully support calls for a review of bus provision so routes can serve all of our communities, prioritising access to key infrastructure including hospitals and health services and schools.

In addition to being accessible, transport options also need to be affordable. Affordability is always listed as a top priority for passengers. Improvements as outlined above will require significant investment, and this cannot simply come from the pockets of passengers or the taxpayer alone. Given the upcoming changes in local Government structures and Government spending priorities, there is huge uncertainty over how and whether changes will be delivered, even if the perfect solution could be identified.

Attracting investment requires market confidence, therefore I would urge the Government to provide a very clear statement of intent to prioritise UK infrastructure in its upcoming spending review and subsequent policy decisions, to support the long-term prospects of both our economy and our communities.

Reducing noise and air pollution

While our transport links bring many local benefits, they also create significant levels of additional noise and air pollution for residents. Addressing this should be a core part of any transport strategy, and ensuring a sustainable balance between delivering an efficient transport network that can support communities and economic prosperity, while delivering on environmental goals, will be challenging but essential.

Supporting the development and use of sustainable fuels and technology across all transport networks will be key to this. However, the delivery of a high quality, connected public transport system could in itself also go a long way to achieving these aims.

One key issue that will have a significant impact on this area of policy is that of airport expansion. As referenced above, the indication of support in principle for a third runway at Heathrow must also be considered as part of any wider transport strategy.

I have been a long-standing opponent of a third runway at Heathrow – while economic growth is important, so are the lives of the people this decision would affect, the environmental implications of such development, and the need to balance growth across the whole of the UK, to name but a few key considerations. Decisions should be made on the detail.

I will be looking closely at any plans brought forward to see what provisions are included in to reduce noise and air pollution, such as increased climb rates and use of sustainable fuels by aircraft, as well as the level of proposed public engagement and the improvements to local transport infrastructure that would be needed. I will be calling on the Government to ensure all these factors are addressed prior to any formal decision on plans.

Effective co-ordination across these networks

Crucial to all these issues is the interaction between transport networks and the agencies and organisations that operate them. Too often there are failures in communication and co-ordination which lead to unnecessary disruption and delays, at huge expense for the taxpayer, local businesses and the economy as a whole.

I therefore believe there should be a duty on such agencies to co-operate, with enforcement powers for those who fail to do so.

In summary, I believe it is clear that ensuring an integrated transport policy is therefore a key priority for me and for residents and businesses across the South East. I therefore support the aims of Transport for the South East, but I am concerned that the timing of this consultation may be ill timed given the broader policy and structural changes occurring.

A new South East strategy may find itself obsolete should the Government bring forward a national transport strategy, as expected by many. In addition, local government reorganisation over next few years will mean the structures and remit under which Transport for the South East is operating may change, and many of the partners they rely upon to shape and deliver this work will no longer exist.

When calling for clarity and co-ordination among transport networks, this must also apply to the organisations responsible for shaping, delivering and enforcing policy in this area. I therefore believe that the Department for Transport should provide a clear statement regarding its intended direction for transport policy in light of these challenges, to ensure work is not duplicated and resources are utilised effectively. I have therefore also sent a copy of this response, and a direct request for such a statement, to the Department for Transport.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Spencer

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Runnymede and Weybridge